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- (1) Parliamentary defense secretary flexible about revising SOFA, but Defense Ministry press officer highlights improving SOFA operation

Tokyo

Parliamentary Defense Secretary Minoru Terada yesterday came out with a flexible stance about revising the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). He noted: "If there are deficiencies despite improving the operation of the SOFA, we will then work on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) to (consider modifying it)." Terada was replying to an appeal made by the Executive Committee of the Prefectural Rally to Protest against Incidents and Accidents Caused by U.S. Service Members.

As for Terada's remarks, the Ministry of Defense's (MOD) spokesman Katashi Toyota said at a regular news conference yesterday: "Taking into consideration cases that can't be dealt with by improving the operation, he might have made such remarks as a general view." The spokesman highlighted the government's previous stance of improving the operation (of the SOFA) to deal with accidents and incidents.

The same day, the petitioners visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the major opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), Upper House Speaker Satsuki Eda, and others, and asked for their support on a drastic revision to the SOFA as mentioned in the prefectural rally's resolution.

On April 12, two sons of U.S. military personnel were held by a shop clerk for shoplifting, but they later were taken by U.S. military police officers to a U.S. base. Referring to this, Senior Vice

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Foreign Minister Hitoshi Kimura noted: "If what the media reported is true, that affects Japan's sovereignty. After investigating it, I'd like to deal with it carefully." Executive Committee Chairman Tetsuei Tamayose, after making an appeal, met the press at the Diet Members' No. 2 Office Building of the Lower House and noted: "Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Matsushige Ono withheld his judgment by telling me, 'I'll convey this to the prime minister.' I expect the prefectural people's call for revising the SOFA will spread across the country."

(2) Okinawa protesters determined to continue efforts to revise SOFA

RYUKYU SHIMPO (Page 21) (Full)
April 16, 2008

The petitioners from the Prefectural Rally to Protest against Incidents and Accidents Caused by U.S. Service Members around noon yesterday held a meeting to report on their appeal to the central government and a press conference at the Diet Members' No. 2 Office Building of the Lower House. The petitioners initially sought to meet with the prime minister and cabinet members, but such meetings were not realized; as a result, they failed to obtain a clear reply to their call for drastically revising the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). This fact brought complaint among the petitioners. In the meeting, all the participants said that they should work harder to achieve their goals.

In the meeting, Tetsuei Tamayose, chairperson of the Prefectural Rally's Executive Committee, looking back on the past two days of their activities (of making a request to the central government in Tokyo), noted, "Those whom we met with were mostly vice ministers or senior vice ministers. They likewise told us, 'I'll convey this to my supervisor.' I want to know how much (our request) has been reflected (in the government's move) through lawmakers elected from Okinawa. By knowing that, I want to aim to bring about a new development. We won't give up." Tamayose stressed the need to continue the campaign.

Vice Chairperson of the Executive Committee Haruko Kowatari, speaking of the request made to Raymond Greene, chief of the Political-Military Affairs Unit at the United States Embassy in

Japan, and also to Senior Vice Foreign Minister Hitoshi Kimura, noted: "Their replies were not satisfactory." She went on to say: "In order to resolve the problems facing Okinawa, a number of protests or petitions need to be made. The situation would improve, albeit slightly, if lawmakers, regardless of their political bent, were to join hands."

(3) Bomb victim speaks of horror of cluster bombs before middle school students, pressing Japan for decision on treaty banning cluster bombs

MAINICHI (Page 3) (Abridged)
April 16, 2008

There are weapons called cluster bombs that are continuing to kill and injure civilians, mostly children. A man from Serbia who lost both hands and feet when he was trying to destroy an unexploded bomblet is now in Japan for the first time. Visiting a middle school in Tokyo yesterday, he spoke of the distressing reality. The international initiative called the Oslo Process is underway to

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conclude a treaty within this year to ban cluster bombs. Participating countries are likely to reach an agreement on a draft treaty in an international conference in May. The victim is pressing the Japanese government, which is reluctant to impose a total ban, for a decision on a total ban.

Branislav Kapetanovic, 42, in a wheelchair spoke before some 300 third-year middle school students at Tamagawa K-12 & University in Machida, Tokyo. A silence enveloped the hall as he spoke: "I have seen so many civilians injured by cluster bombs. I am a victim myself, and I am keenly aware of the horror of cluster bombs."

Kapetanovic was an engineer who disposed of unexploded cluster bombs dropped by NATO forces during the Kosovo conflict in 1999. He lost both hands, feet and hearing in his left ear when a bomblet exploded as he was about to destroy it in a Kraljevo suburb in Serbia in November 2000.

"I believe you have learned much about atomic bombs. There is something common between cluster bombs and atomic bombs, and that is they often victimize ordinary citizens," Kapetanovic said. His speech was followed by ringing applause.

According to a report released in 2007 by Handicap International (HI), an international human rights organization, 13,306 individuals had been recognized as victims of unexploded cluster bombs around the world. Of them, the sex and age of over 9,000 persons was identified. Further, 98 PERCENT of them were civilians. In many cases, children touched unexploded bombs while playing.

Cluster bombs have been used in 25 countries and regions, including Iraq and Lebanon. The number of bomblets exceeded 440 million. Of them, an estimated 22 million to 130 million bomblets still remain unexploded today.

After the speech, students gathered around Kapetanovic. Sayuri Yamamoto, 14, noted, "Mr. Kapetanovic, who lost his hands and feet, taught us the horror of cluster bombs." Kapetanovic said: "I was glad that I was able to deliver a message to the students who bear the responsibility for their country's future. I hope they will take an interest in this issue."

(4) Government regards cluster bombs as deterrent; Gap in eagerness with other countries evident

MAINICHI (Page 3) (Abridged slightly)
April 16, 2008

Cluster bombs were used in major wars from the 1991 Gulf War to the 2003 Iraq war. A large number of cluster bombs were used in the 2006 Lebanon War. This prompted like-minded countries to begin the Oslo Process to craft a treaty banning cluster bombs.

The Oslo Process is modeled after the Ottawa Process, which produced

an anti-personnel mines convention. A total of 156 countries, including Japan, signed the Ottawa Treaty. Growing international pressure has now made it difficult for the United States, which is not a signatory to the treaty, to use land mines.

Over 100 countries, including Japan, have joined the Oslo Process. They aim for an agreement on a draft ban treaty at a meeting to be held in May in Dublin.

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The process has been disrupted over whether to ban all such bombs or only sophisticated bombs. But recently, there has been a move to search for common ground. The draft is close to a total ban, as it is intended to ban all such bombs except for up-to-date models that can attack military installations only, that have few unexploded bomblets, and that detonate unexploded bomblets automatically.

"Japan is trying to keep as many cluster bombs as possible," an NGO official said. There is a huge gap in the degree of eagerness between Japan and other countries.

Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba indicated in a press conference yesterday that Japan would retain cluster bombs, saying: "The defensive use of (cluster bombs) as a deterrent deserves a positive assessment." A senior Foreign Ministry official also noted: "Taking measures to eliminate damage is necessary, but striking a balance with national interests and security is also important."

Ahead of the meeting in May, the Japanese government is trying to persuade other countries to reduce control subjects as much as possible with the aim of stopping moves for a total ban. Although Japan supported the idea of crafting a ban treaty in February, if this situation persists, it might be regarded internationally as a country negative about it.

(5) Research whaling ship Nisshin Maru returns to Tokyo; Whale meat prices may be increased due to drop in whale catch

SANKEI (Page 29) (Full)
April 16, 2008

The Nisshin Maru, the mother ship of the Japanese whaling fleet that was hampered by violent protests from the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society in the Southern Ocean, arrived on April 15 at Oi Marine Products Wharf in Tokyo. Tomoyuki Ogawa was the captain of the ship, which has 143 crew members. The whaling fleet caught 551 whales this season, only about 60 percent of the target due to acts of obstruction by the antiwhaling organization. As such, the Fisheries Agency mentioned a hike in the prices of meat from whales. Whale meat will likely become more expensive from this summer.

The whaling research fleet departed Japan on Nov. 18, 2007. The research period was 101 days, excluding the days spent on the way to and from the Southern Ocean. However, the whalers were forced to suspend their research whaling for 31 days due to harassment by Sea Shepherd.

Although the whalers had planned to catch a total of 900 whales - about 850 black minke whales and 50 fin whales - they caught only 60 PERCENT of the target. They failed to catch any fin whales. The original plan of catching 50 humpback whales was put off in consideration of international negotiations on a resumption of commercial whaling.

Because the whale catch substantially fell short of the target, the Fisheries Agency, which sets the wholesale prices of whale meat, revealed that a hike in whale meat prices would be possible.

However since the meat from whales caught this season will be on sale in the summer, the prices of whale meat will be decided after considering the results of research whaling to be compiled in June.

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Therefore, whether the prices of whale meat will be increased remains uncertain.

The Japan Coast Guard, which has investigated the obstruction by Sea Shepherd on suspicion of assault, and the Public Safety Department of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department intend to inspect the Nisshin Maru today.

The five other ships of the whaling fleet are slated to return by April 19 to four ports, including Oi Marine Products Wharf and Taniyama Port in Kagoshima Prefecture.

(6) Taking a look at politics: Can short-tempered premier display strong political leadership?

ASAHI (Page 4) (Abridged)
April 15, 2008

Hiroshi Hoshi

Prime Minister Fukuda is unexpectedly short-tempered. When things do not go his way, aides have seen him kick his desk and shout expletives.

In the process of nominating a new Bank of Japan (BOJ) governor, Fukuda chose a former Ministry of Finance (MOF) official, but the proposal was rejected in the Upper House. Fukuda again proposed another former Finance Ministry official for the post, but the proposal was again rejected in the Upper House. Fukuda suggested moving the tax revenues set aside for road projects into the general account in fiscal 2009, but this suggestion was not welcomed by the major opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ).

In last summer's the Upper House election, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) led by then Prime Minister Shintaro Abe suffered a devastating defeat, which led to the currently divided Diet. Fukuda said when he assumed the post of prime minister: "Taking office as prime minister now may be getting the worst of the deal." For Fukuda, the current situation is indeed what he was worried about at the beginning.

Fukuda might have been frustrated with that situation, but there are limits to what he can do. The nomination of a BOJ governor needs to be approved in both chambers of the Diet. As long as the DPJ is opposed to allowing retired MOF officials to get plum jobs, such people will not be approved. As is widely expected, the DPJ will not easily concede on the road issue, as the party aims to bring about a dissolution of the Lower House for a snap election. The prime minister lamented that the loss of 2.6 trillion yen from the provisional (gasoline) tax in tax revenues is detrimental to fiscal reconstruction, but no sense of urgency was felt from his remarks, given that the government's debt has now expanded to 800 trillion yen.

Perhaps because of this, the Fukuda cabinet's approval ratings have been sinking and it is losing momentum. Headlines touting the imminent end of the Fukuda administration can be seen in weekly magazines. One aide to the prime minister, however, remains unruffled, noting: "The prime minister is in roaring spirits. He is not a politician who would be discouraged by this situation. In the first place, there are no moves in the LDP to remove him from the post." However, some in the party believe that Fukuda cabinet is

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headed to ruin if nothing is done to change the situation.

Former Chief Cabinet Secretary Kaoru Yosano, who has given advice to Fukuda at important political junctures, is looking for the best way to deal with the current situation. Yosano said:

"The government assumed an attitude of forcing the opposition parties to accept its nomination, claiming that it nominated the best person. This attitude was a mistake. Aside from such daily tasks as the nomination of the top BOJ leader and what to do about the tax revenues for road projects, it's high time for Mr. Fukuda to come out with a big political slogan in order to demonstrate his

strong political imprint. There are a lot of subjects for him to handle to that end, for instance, fiscal reconstruction and the environment issue."

Yosano insists that emerging from the squabble between the ruling and opposition blocs, Fukuda needs to demonstrate his administration's imprint in dealing with mid-term or long-term tasks.

When he visited China late last year, Fukuda declared a plan to invite 10,000 Chinese engineers studying environmental technology to Japan. Later, Fukuda reportedly complained about the media's way of reporting the plan: "The plan was epoch-making, but the Japanese media at the time did not give it major coverage because their interest was focused on when the cabinet would be shuffled." Despite this past circumstance, if Fukuda, with the aim of making Japan into an environmental power, comes out with new ideas one after the other, for instance, providing leading-edge technology, that could become the selling point of Fukuda politics.

Diplomacy toward Asia, too, may give Fukuda a good opportunity. South Korean President Lee Myung Bak is to visit Japan on April 20, and Chinese President Hu Jintao is to visit Japan early May. Fukuda appears to get along well with them, both of whom give priority to results. If Fukuda, after meeting with them, can work together with them to deal with North Korea, economic cooperation, and human exchanges, he could make a significant contribution to bringing stability to East Asia.

The battle between the ruling and opposition parties over a re-vote on the bill aimed at raising the gasoline tax will come to a climax later this month. While getting by the immediate skirmish in the Diet, Fukuda needs to demonstrate his strong political leadership. Can Fukuda do that? Or will he simply kick his desk over his inability to do anything?

(7) Editorial - amendment to Antimonopoly Law: Toughening penalties global trend

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 5) (Full)
April 15, 2008/04/15

An amendment to the Antimonopoly Law has been submitted to the current session of the Diet. The amendment includes expanding the scope of application for surcharges and introducing a premium surcharge rate applicable to firms leading such illegal acts. Countries that are toughening penalties against violations are not limited to the United States and the European Union (EU). Japan needs to hurry Diet debate on the amendment so that it will be passed into law swiftly.

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The Antimonopoly Law is called an economic constitution. It was drastically modified two years ago by, for instance, raising the surcharge calculation rate for large manufacturers by 10 PERCENT . But the number of violations related to bid rigging and cartels has almost doubled and increased to 24 from the year before. An amendment this time to the law is intended to beef up deterrent power against violations.

The core of the amendment drafted by the Fair Trade Commission (FTC) is that exclusionary private monopolies, dumping, and abuse of dominant bargaining position will be all subject to surcharges.

An example of an exclusionary private monopoly might be a company with a dominant market position in the area of basic computer parts trying to exclude rival firms by adopting a rebate system. In the past, all the FTC did was issue an order to remove the rebate system to firms violating this rule, but once the amendment comes into effect, the FTC can impose surcharges on such firms.

Dumping will also be subject to surcharges under certain conditions. On the fake recycled paper scandal involving eight paper manufacturers, the FTC intends to issue an order to eliminate the use of fake recycled paper, but this case, too, will be subject to

surcharges in the future.

As part of the move to toughen penalties, surcharges that will be imposed on firms that played a leading role in bid rigging or cartels will be hiked by 50 PERCENT . In the case of leading manufacturers, the surcharge rate will become 15 PERCENT .

Meanwhile, the surcharge exemption system, which was adopted in the previous amendment to the law, has helped Japanese companies change their behavior significantly. The system is used by a number of large companies, including Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. Currently, the number of companies coming under the system is three, but the amendment will increase the number of those companies to five.

The future task (for the FTC) is what to do about the amounts of surcharges. Last year the European Commission (EC) ordered a Japanese firm to pay a surcharge of more than 100 billion yen for taking part in a cartel. Japan decides on the surcharge based on the sales amount of the business in question, but the EC calculates the surcharge based on overall sales. There is a need to have debate on the criteria for the calculation of surcharges.

As for the tribunal system taken by the FTC at present, the amendment stipulates a review of the system, including the possibility of scrapping it, in an additional clause. A tribunal that is equivalent to the first trial is carried out by FTC officers and lawyers. This method has invoked strong dissatisfaction in economic circles. One business leader complained: "Prosecutors play the role of judge."

So far the tribunal system has functioned well thanks to the FTC's fairness and also its winning the public's confidence. But judgment should be entrusted to the judiciary in the future, although opinion is divided over the question of whether all cases will be put in the hands of the judiciary. This matter, too, needs to be debated in the Diet.

An international conference bringing together competition policy

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regulators of major countries kicked off in Kyoto. Companies must keep in mind that toughening penalties against illegal acts has become a global trend.

SCHIEFFER